

rollcall votes on this one bill as on all the bills in 2017, when the Republicans were in the majority—nearly as many amendment votes on this one bill as over that entire year. We are running the Senate in a different way.

So I want to thank my colleagues on both sides for their efforts, Senators CANTWELL and WICKER for their excellent management of the bill, Senator YOUNG for working with me from the beginning until the very end, Senators MENENDEZ and RISCH as well as MURRAY, DURBIN, PETERS, BROWN, and WYDEN, whom I am committing to working with to put real teeth into the anti-censorship provisions of this bill before it becomes law. Senator WYDEN has been a hallmark on that.

Of course, the job is not done until the legislation moves through the House and onto the President's desk.

Now that the bill has passed the Senate, we are going to work with Speaker PELOSI and the relevant committee chairs in the House to move this bill forward as quickly as possible.

Of course, the House can bring in additional priorities, but I am intent on seeing the major thrust of this legislation become law. The bill is so important to the future of America that the House and Senate must come together and send President Biden a bill he is very, very eager to sign.

Yesterday, the Senate took a bold, strong step toward boosting American science, technology, and innovation for decades. We are going to keep at it, keep at it until we cross the finish line.

PAYCHECK FAIRNESS

Mr. President, on paycheck fairness, almost immediately, however, we saw the limits of bipartisanship in the Senate last evening, right after we voted on USICA, the U.S. Innovation and Competition Act.

Minutes after coming together to pass that sweeping competition bill, Senate Republicans mounted a partisan filibuster against a very straightforward piece of legislation to help provide equal pay to women.

The vote was party line. Not a single Republican Senator voted in favor of even debating the bill. Sure, my colleagues might not like every aspect of Democratic legislation. I understand that. But if you want to change the bill, you have to let the Senate debate it and amend it.

It is shocking that my Republican colleagues believe that the Senate has no role to play in defending the rights of women who are unfairly and illegally discriminated against in the workplace. For a reason that I can't understand, the issue of pay equity has become a partisan one, sadly. Democrats in favor; Republicans opposed—despite the fact that the issue isn't all that partisan out in the country. A solid majority of voters see pay equity as a problem and believe Congress has a role to play in solving it.

It reminds me of gun safety. Ninety to ninety-five percent of America supports expanding background checks so

that people who shouldn't get a gun—felons and others—don't. The vast majority of Republicans in the country, the vast majority of gun owners in the country, support that policy. Only in DC, among Republicans here in the Senate and in the House, is that issue remotely partisan, where Washington Republicans have traditionally opposed it.

So before the press writes the latest Republican filibuster of equal pay legislation as just another chapter in the typical partisan games, just remember that the only place this issue is partisan is in Washington, with Republicans way out of touch with what the American people want.

Americans across the country expect their government to make progress on big issues, even if we don't agree on everything. But yesterday, sadly, Senate Republicans once again chose the path of obstruction and gridlock.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, finally, on judges, yesterday, the Senate confirmed the first two judges of President Biden's tenure—now—Judges Neals of New Jersey and Rodriguez of Colorado.

These judges are only the first of many to come. The Democratic majority in the Senate is going to move quickly to confirm Biden's judicial appointments. So after the two confirmations yesterday, we wasted no time in preparing the next slate of nominees.

Last night, I took the necessary step to set up votes on two more judges—Zahid Quraishi for the District Court of New Jersey and Kentanji Brown Jackson to serve on the powerful DC Circuit Court of Appeals.

Democrats believe in not only bringing demographic diversity but professional diversity to the Federal bench. In fact, this morning I had the privilege of introducing my recommendation to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in the Judiciary Committee, Ms. Eunice Lee.

Once confirmed, Ms. Lee would become the second African-American woman ever to sit on this powerful and important Second Circuit and would be the only former Federal defender among its active roster of judges.

As I mentioned, we believe in demographic diversity but professional diversity as well. All too often, the bench has been filled with a very narrow sector—partners in big law firms, prosecutors. What about the rest? What about public defenders like Ms. Lee? What about voting rights lawyers, like Mr. Ho and Ms. Perez, whom I recommended to the President this week? We must defend—we must expand not only demographic diversity but professional diversity. And I know that President Biden agrees with me on this, and this will be something that I will set out to do not only in New York, along with Senator GILLIBRAND, but across the country.

And the two other nominees I mentioned are powerful examples as well. Mr. Quraishi will be the first American

Muslim in U.S. history to serve as an article III Federal judge. The third largest religion in the United States, he will become the first to ever serve as an article III judge, and we will confirm his nomination this week.

And next up is the nomination of Judge Jackson. After a sterling career as a district court judge, a Federal defender, a Commissioner on the Sentencing Commission, and a clerk to Justice Breyer, Ms. Brown Jackson is poised to take a seat on the DC Circuit Court of Appeals, the second highest court in the land. She will fill the seat of now-Attorney General Merrick Garland.

Oftentimes, nominees to the powerful DC Circuit Court are controversial, in spite of their qualifications, because the stakes are so high. But I am proud to say that Ms. Brown Jackson came out of the Judiciary Committee on a bipartisan—a bipartisan—vote, and soon the entire Senate will confirm this highly qualified jurist to one of the most important positions and courts in the country.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I was disappointed to learn yesterday that President Biden had walked away from negotiations on infrastructure spending with Senator CAPITO.

For several weeks, the ranking member of the EPW Committee has been engaged in good faith on finding common ground with the administration. She has led several of our colleagues in literally exhaustive efforts to put a bipartisan deal within reach.

Senate Republicans proposed historic investments in the kinds of things most Americans would call actual infrastructure. They met and exceeded the President's own threshold demands, and then they were left at the table.

Our colleagues weren't wrong to bet on bipartisanship. For one thing, it is what the American people actually deserve. For another, as I have noted before, infrastructure investments have historically featured overwhelming bipartisan consensus. But an agreement requires that actually each side is willing to give up some of what it wants. And as we learned yesterday, President Biden is unwilling to let go of some of the most radical promises he made to the leftwing of his party.

From the day the White House rolled out its first "infrastructure" plan in

March, it has been clear that the left's definition of the word is evolving faster than even some Democrats can actually keep up with. Medicaid expansion is now infrastructure, paid leave is now infrastructure, and job-killing tax increases to hold the assortment all together.

At every step of the way, Republicans have focused on targeted investments in roads, bridges, airports, waterways, and broadband infrastructure the American people actually need.

But yesterday, President Biden showed that his patience for the smart, bipartisan approach was wearing thin. He directed Democratic leaders in Congress to get ready to ram through more expansive, unrelated spending unilaterally.

Meanwhile, Senator CAPITO and our colleagues on the EPW Committee continue to demonstrate that bipartisan infrastructure investment is actually still within reach.

In April, the Senate passed their water infrastructure bill by a count of 89 to 2. And just a couple weeks ago, the committee reported out a historic investment to surface transportation, and they did it unanimously. It is disappointing that President Biden has been unwilling to follow the Senate's productive example.

And now some of our colleagues have signaled that they intend to use this month to depart from that example, themselves. The Democratic leader has laid out a partisan agenda he seems to hope will illustrate that the Senate is somehow broken.

Remember, the Senate is 50-50—50-50. The American people did not hand the Democrats a mandate in the Senate. This series of radical proposals has no chance of becoming law, but every intention of justifying reckless changes to the way the body actually operates—plans to jam hospitals, schools, and small businesses with new high-stakes tests of “wokeness,” to dramatically curtail Americans’ right to keep and bear arms, and, of course, to tip the scales of our electoral system permanently in their favor.

Yesterday, the radical parade began with an attempt to use the cause of paycheck fairness as cover for placing unprecedented new legal burdens on American employers. Wage discrimination on the basis of sex has been illegal for 60 years. Wage discrimination on the basis of sex has been illegal for 60 years. What Democrats proposed yesterday was to kick down carefully constructed protections to leave even the smallest American business at risk of unlimited liability in workplace cases—listen to this—even where malice plays no part. Their bill would force workers to opt out of, rather than into, class-action suits—in other words, a gift-wrapped bonanza for the trial bar. Unsurprisingly, that gambit not only failed to pass; it failed to even unite a majority of the Senate.

So if our colleagues intended to actually earn support for consensus steps

on paycheck fairness, they might have considered subjecting their proposal to scrutiny through the normal legislative process—perhaps a markup or even a committee hearing.

Well, apparently when your agenda is designed to fail, regular order is just a waste of time.

FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. President, now on an entirely different matter, I have been outspoken on the importance of sustaining America's support for local partners who are leading counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere, even when doing so has put me at odds with the Presidents, actually, of both parties.

When the previous administration considered precipitous withdrawals from Afghanistan and Syria, I sponsored a bipartisan amendment warning that doing so could “allow terrorists to regroup . . . to the detriment of United States interests and those of our allies.”

Dozens of Senate Democrats joined the measure at that point.

Last year, the Congress overrode veto threats and put explicit restrictions and reporting requirements on force drawdowns in the annual Defense authorization act. I and others voted to override the veto of a Republican President. The goal wasn't to tie the hands of the Commander in Chief. It was to force the administration to seriously address the risks to U.S. interests posed by any potential withdrawal.

But this spring, when President Biden announced his intention to abandon the battlefield in Afghanistan completely—completely—without a plan, there was a bit less outrage, for some reason, on the Democratic side of the aisle.

And yesterday, the President moved to waive the NDAA requirements that Senate Democrats themselves had supported in order to proceed with this misguided retreat.

The White House has yet to address the obvious risks of our departure: that the Taliban will regain control, al-Qaida will return to strength, and the people of Afghanistan—particularly, women and girls—will suffer.

We don't have to wait long for these fears to prove prescient. The Taliban has wasted no time in ramping up its campaign to drag more of the country back under its oppressive medieval rule—more killing of soldiers, journalists, and activists; more oppression of women; and more ambitious operational goals.

As one Taliban commander put it, “when we arrive in Kabul, we will arrive as conquerors.” Well, they are inching closer every day while we withdraw, and this is all happening, as I just indicated, before our retreat is even complete.

Experts are still unsure just how quickly the Taliban's resurgence will accelerate as we depart. That is bad news for our partners in Kabul. It is bad news for the Afghan military,

which is losing its edge without coalition support on the ground. And it is especially bad news for Afghanistan's women and girls. I know many of my colleagues share my concern for our partners in Afghanistan and for the many Afghan women who have reclaimed so much of their freedom since 2001. So make no mistake, their future will be imperiled under Taliban rule.

Rhetorical support for Senate resolutions and hollow promises of assistance from afar might ease our consciences somewhat, but they cannot take the place of the coalition forces in supporting our partners and vulnerable populations in Afghanistan. That won't prevent the resurgence of al-Qaida, with whom a recent United Nations report found Taliban militants “show no indication of breaking ties.”

So where is the plan? Where is the plan to deal with these challenges as we abandon our partners and leave them to the Taliban?

How does the administration intend to combat terror or support Afghan forces if we are hundreds of miles away? How does it intend to counter the negative influence of Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, and others who might see our departure as massive opportunity? Have we learned nothing from Russia's intervention in Syria?

So later this week, President Biden will meet in person with leaders of our NATO allies, many of whom have expressed concerns about the risks of a precipitous withdrawal from Afghanistan. But, of course, as we withdraw, they will, as well, because without us there won't be a NATO presence in Afghanistan.

So for the sake of American security and the strength of our partnerships, it is time for the President to finally offer some clear answers to advance our shared interest in combating terrorists who still mean us harm and to restore faith in our resolve to finish things that we start.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CYBERSECURITY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, last week, we learned that global meat processing company JBS, one of the four meatpacking companies responsible for more than 80 percent of beef processing operations, had suffered a ransomware attack. The attack temporarily shuttered the company's U.S. beef plants, threatening the beef supply and leaving ranchers wondering once again whether they would be able to sell their cattle.

The JBS attack highlights two important issues. The first is cyber security. The rise of ransomware attacks